

The Second Front: Waging War on the Media in the Persian Gulf

By TED KOPPEL
Anchor, ABC News *Nightline*

Somewhere between the star-spangled, flag-waving, Whitney Houston welcome-home television specials and the self-doubting, self-loathing caricature of a conspiratorial system run by defense contractors, Wall Street, special-interest lobbyists, and corrupt politicians—somewhere between those two extremes lies the America that is waiting to absorb both the ambitions and the ideals of the Class of 1991. Few, if any, of our heroes are as flawless as the myth-makers would have us believe. Few, if any, of the motives which lead us to war are ever as unsullied as our leaders like to pretend. The challenge that confronts us is to recognize and identify the abuses without discarding the symmetry of the system. With that in mind, I want to talk about the war and the press, that famous or infamous, unelected, unappointed Fourth Estate.

The coalition forces led by the United States won two great victories in the Persian Gulf. The first, over the Iraqi armed forces of Saddam Hussein; the second, over the U.S. media. For much of the time and with few exceptions, the media looked silly, petulant, and whiny, all the more so in the face of a brilliantly executed campaign that made fools of most of the experts and analysts. Between August and February, we variously predicted that Washington would never get the United Nations Security Council to authorize the use of force. We were wrong. That Congress wouldn't authorize the use of force to implement all of the U.N. resolutions—wrong again. That the Israelis would be drawn into the war—wrong. That air power alone could never win a war. We were partly right but mostly wrong on that one, too. That a ground war would result in thousands,

Excerpted from Koppel's speech to the University of Pennsylvania class of '91.

possibly tens of thousands of U.S. casualties. We were mercifully and almost totally wrong on that one. That the war would drag on for months—well, in one sense, the jury is still out on that one. The Bush Administration miscalculated Saddam's staying power and failed tragically to anticipate the consequences of encouraging the Kurds and the Shiites to try to bring about Saddam's ouster. Still, on balance, the Administration appears to have been vindicated in keeping the press on a short leash during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

So it would seem, although I am going to try to convince you otherwise. It is likely, I grant you, to be an uphill struggle. How could anyone watch those daily briefings from Saudi Arabia and the Pentagon without marveling at the patience and confidence of the military briefers? How could anyone watch those same briefings without cringing at the nitpicking, downright silliness of some reporters' questions? Indeed, *The New York Times*, informed us... there came a point during the war when the administration was beginning to worry about its credibility, when it was toying with the idea of easing restrictions on what reporters could see and say; and then, as the *Times* put it, reassurance for the Administration came from an unlikely quarter. *Saturday Night Live* broadcast a skit lampooning the press, mocking the apparent stupidity and self-importance of many of the reporters attending those briefings. The moment of self-doubt that might have caused the Administration to lift some of its restrictions on the press evaporated....

And yet... What you were watching at those press briefings was a process, not a product. German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck has been credited with the observation that if you like laws and sausage, you should never watch either one being made. I would add journalism

to that short list. The process in each case is somewhat messy and unappetizing. Indeed, it is far more difficult to become a sausage-maker in this country than a journalist. Anyone can become a journalist, anyone at all. There is no test to be taken, no degree to be acquired, no license to be purchased; there is no supervisory board, no governmental agency to be consulted. If you have a pencil and a piece of paper and the means of duplicating your work-product so that you can hand it out on a street corner, you are, by definition, a journalist....

Winston Churchill once noted, on the shortcomings and merits of democracy, that it is the world's worst form of government—with the possible exception of every other kind. And much the same can be said of American journalism. Setting forth no restrictions produces a messy, sometimes painful product. It permits the publication of incompetent, brittle, and shameful untruths, which even our libel laws seem powerless to inhibit. It fills our supermarket checkout counters with tabloids that strain the definition of contempt. It provides the legal footing for the construction of pornographic empires. It has even brought its elastic standards to radio and television, which were once inhibited by the more strenuous standards imposed by our use of the public airwaves. Freedom is a dangerous and unpredictable commodity—unless you consider the alternatives.

Should our reporters and analysts be licensed, and, if so, by whom? The Government or some trade association, perhaps? And who would police those with the motives and with the power to license—or, for that matter, with the power to revoke licenses? What kind of a press do we find under those systems that have the power to control their media? Or

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OPC CALENDAR 3 W. 51ST ST. RESERVATIONS 983-4655. LODGING, MEALS 582-5454

Panel Eyes Free-Trade Agreements

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 5:30 p.m. U.S.-Mexico Free-trade Agreements: A Powerful New Player in World Trade. Reservations required: 212-983-4655.

Wednesday, Nov. 20, 5:30 p.m. Board of Governors.

Wednesday, Dec. 11, 5:30 p.m. Annual Holiday Party. \$25 per person for gala evening in the casual lounge and pub. Send or bring small gifts for Santa's pack. Reservations required: 212-983-4655

Thursday, Dec. 5, 5:30 p.m. Pearl Harbor: 50 Years Later.

Tuesday, Dec. 17, Lunch. Board of Governors.

Wednesday, Jan. 15, 5:30 p.m. Board of Governors.

Tuesday, April 28, 1992. Annual Awards Dinner, Grand Hyatt Hotel, New York. Black tie. Mark your calendars now!

All programs and meetings held at 3 W. 51st St. unless indicated otherwise. For reservations for lodging or restaurants, dial 212-582-5454.

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CPJ Honors Defiant Journalists

The Committee to Protect Journalists on Oct. 23 honored eight journalists who have worked to safeguard a free press in their homeland.

CPJ's 1991 Press Freedom Award winners included:

- Byron Barrera, a Guatemalan journalist seriously wounded last year when gunmen opened fire on his car in Guatemala City, killing his wife. Barrera has received numerous death threats and was forced to shut down each of his three publications, including the weekly *La Epoca*, which was bombed in 1988.

- Tatyana Mitkova, a Russian news anchor who refused to read a script mistating the fact that Soviet troops killed 13 people when they stormed a Lithuanian television tower last January. Mitkova, who clued in her audience before someone else read the announce-

ment, soon left the show in protest.

- Pius Njawe, a journalist harassed by government officials in Cameroon for his press activity. Njawe has been held at gunpoint, had his passport confiscated, and been taken to court for editorializing against the lack of freedom of expression and for publishing a letter critical of the national congress.

- Bill Foley and Cary Vaughan, friends of hostage Terry Anderson who have lobbied at their own expense for Anderson's release. Foley and Vaughan, his wife, met Anderson while Foley was working as a photographer for the Associated Press in Lebanon.

- Chen Ziming and Wang Juntao, a pair of Chinese journalists serving 13-year jail terms for their pro-democracy activities. Ziming was publisher and Juntao editor of the reform-minded *Economics Weekly* before they were arrested and charged with "counter-revolutionary propaganda and incitement" leading to the 1989 Tiananmen Square uprising.

Finally, Walter Cronkite was awarded CPJ's Burton Benjamin Memorial Award for lifetime achievement in advancing the cause of press freedom.

Tom Brokaw, Peter Jennings, Dan Rather, Bernard Shaw, Anne Nelson, and Aline Benjamin presented the awards.

Overseas Press Club of America, Inc.
310 Madison Avenue, Suite 2116
New York, New York 10017 USA

OVERSEAS PRESS CLUB OF AMERICA 3 W. 51ST ST. NEW YORK NOVEMBER 1991

OPC Bulletin



German journalist Georg Wulffius, center, presents OPC President H.L. Stevenson, left, and 1st VP Ralph Gardner with a token of friendship. Story, p. 3.

OPC Unveils New Award for Radio, TV

A new OPC award, with a \$1,000 honorarium, will honor radio and television reporters for business and economic news reporting from abroad.

To be unveiled at the club's annual black tie dinner April 28, 1992, the award will be known as the Carl Spielvogel Award, in honor of the chairman and chief executive of one of the world's largest advertising agencies.

The club already awards distinguished reporting in this field for magazines and for newspapers-wire services.

The Carl Spielvogel Award is being funded by Spielvogel's wife, author Barbara Lee Diamonsteen.

"With the increasing importance of the economy all over the world, it is

fitting that radio and television journalism be recognized for its role in coverage," said awards chairman Allan Dodds Frank and president H.L. Stevenson in a joint statement. "A former journalist, Carl Spielvogel has long been associated with international business, and with broadcasting. His name on the award is a tribute to his work and his agency."

Spielvogel, 62, covered advertising and business developments as a reporter for *The New York Times* in the 1950s. He switched to the advertising world in the 1960s as an assistant to the legendary Marion Harper Jr., head of McCann-Erickson.

In 1980, Spielvogel left the firm to open an agency with Bill Backer. Their partnership evolved into the advertising and marketing colossus Backer Spielvogel Bates Worldwide, which Spielvogel now runs. The company bills \$2 billion annually.

Eighteen other awards will be presented by the OPC next spring in New York for meritorious work from overseas in newspapers, magazines, broadcasting, and photography and for the best book on international affairs.

Rwanda Frees Two Journalists

Two journalists jailed for their press activities in Rwanda have been released with no pending charges, the nation's ambassador to Washington told OPC.

Norman Schorr, chairman of OPC's Freedom of the Press Committee, who had written Rwandese President Juvenal Habyarimana on the journalists' behalf, said the ambassador's letter in response "indicates that our appeals are being read by the governments."

One of the freed journalists was Sixbert Musangamfura, editor of the weekly *Isibo*. He was sentenced July 31 to a year in prison for allegedly defaming a government official in articles and cartoons published earlier this year.

The other, Marcellin Kayiranga, editor of the weekly *Le Soleil*, was held overnight in August after publishing a confidential letter. He was informally accused of stealing state secrets.

"The charges surrounding both cases threaten freedom of the press in your country," Schorr wrote in his appeal. "Journalists should be able to cover sensitive issues, professionally and accurately, without intimidation."

In October, OPC protested the recent killing of Jacques Siméon, a broadcaster for Radio Caraïbes in Haiti, and of Melissa Alfaro, editor of the Lima weekly *Cambio*. The club also urged Chilean officials to investigate the abduction of Cristián Edwards, manager of the *El Mercurio* provincial newspapers.

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EASTERN EUROPE

CHARTER URGED FOR FREE PRESS

Former USIA Director **Leonard Marks** has recommended a 10-point "Charter of a Free Press" as a model for newly democratic countries in Europe and for the Soviet Union.

Marks, an officer of the OPC-affiliated World Press Freedom Committee, led an international roundtable in Moscow on the lack of training, scarcity of hard currency, and political pressures on journalists.

"The flow of news across national frontiers cannot be free if the flow of news within those frontiers is not free," Marks said at the Sept. 23-24 meeting.

His charter brands any form of censorship unacceptable, calls for an end to state monopolies on newsprint, and urges editorial independence.

GRANT BRINGS AP TO 7 COUNTRIES

Nine newspapers and a newsweekly in seven Eastern European nations will receive three month's Associ-

ated Pressservices for free.

The project is designed to "provide both an independent source of news and a stream of examples of how fact-oriented news stories are written," said **Harold Anderson**, chairman of World Free Press Committee.

WFPC, which already provides AP service to *Lidove Noviny* in Prague, Czechoslovakia, will administer the new project through a grant by The Freedom Forum. Recipients include publications in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, and Lithuania and possibly Hungary and Albania.

CENTRAL AMERICA

CHAMORRO VOWS TO DEFEND PRESS

Nicaraguan President **Violeta Chamorro**, winner of OPC's 1990 President's Award, reaffirmed her commitment to the defense of freedom of the press in September.

Chamorro, the former publisher of the Managua daily *La Prensa*, received an Inter American Association Press

Freedom Award in Costa Rica.

"So long as Violeta Chamorro is president of Nicaragua, freedom of the press shall be defended unfalteringly," she said.

Chamorro supporters have accused the Sandinista-led police force and its chief, Cuban-trained Rene Vivas, of working against those values. They said Vivas helped leftist militants avoid prosecution for seizing a Managua radio station in June.

DOWN UNDER

OPCER JOURNEYS IN AUSTRALIA

Louis Zara, an OPCer from New York City, traveled across Australia in late August and September collecting material for articles, lectures, and a book to be called "Of Stones, Gems and People."

During his 25,000-mile trip, Zara visited opal fields in Coober Pedy, gold fields at Kalgoorlie and Ballarat, South Sea pearl fisheries on the west coast near Broome, and the Argyle diamond mines in mountainous East Kimberly.

GUTEN TAG, NEW YORK

GERMAN CLUB TAKES U.S. TOUR

Georg Wulffius and several other members of the International Press Club of Munich were guests at an informal OPC reception Oct. 23 in New York.

In their third U.S. tour, members of the German club said they also planned to visit Philadelphia and Washington.

FINAL FLIGHT

FAREWELL TO ACE WINS TOP PRIZE

Charles Arnot, a retired veteran foreign correspondent and OPC member, won first place in the essay category in the Arizona Authors' Association writing contest.

Arnot's winning article, selected from 800 entries, described the last flight of Navy Lt. Cmdr. Edward "Butch" O'Hare, the first American aerial "ace" of World War II. As a war correspondent aboard the U.S.S. Enterprise, Arnot was the last person to bid O'Hare farewell before

he died in a night battle with the Japanese off the Gilbert Islands in 1943.

Arnot won a 1962 OPC plaque for best television coverage from abroad.

ON-THE-JOB HAZARDS

STRAY GUNFIRE HITS REPORTER

With more than a dozen journalists killed in Yugoslavia this year, The Associated Press's **Julijana Mojsilovic** learned that even joyous troops can be dangerous.

Mojsilovic, who works for AP's Belgrade bureau, was grazed by stray bullet fragments Oct. 7 when Yugoslavian army reservists fired into the air to celebrate news that the Croatian-held village of Cavtat had fallen.

"The news was false," Mojsilovic wrote, "but the gunfire was very real."

BOOKS, BRIEFLY

LOOKING BACK ON SOVIET RELATIONS

Don Oberdorfer, a longtime diplomatic

correspondent for *The Washington Post*, has written a book on the unprecedented thaw in U.S.-Soviet relations over the past decade.

The Turn: From the Cold War to a New Era, The United States and the Soviet Union, 1983-1990, draws on Oberdorfer's experience covering events along the way and his more recent interviews with key U.S. and Soviet policy makers.

The *Post*'s John Lewis Gaddis called the book "the best account yet of how this astonishing transformation in Soviet-American relations came about."

MILITARY PUTS DESERTS AT RISK

Ted Bartimus, who helped arrange OPC's 1986 Vietnam reunion, and **Scott McCartney** have written a book on how the collision of science and nature transforms the lives of ordinary people.

Published on Nov. 1 by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, *Trinity's Children: Living Along America's Nuclear Highway* describes the high-tech military hardware concentrated along 1,000 miles of Interstate 25 from the deserts of New Mexico



OPC'er Kay Horkan, right, gives Bavarian Minister President Streibl the first copy of *GAP Journal*, a tourist magazine she edits.

to the Wyoming high plains. Along that route lies a storehouse of nuclear weapons with the potential to poison ground water with carcinogens and contaminate soil with plutonium, said the authors, both veteran journalists with The Associated Press.

HOLLAND, GERMANY

MEMBER DEBUTS TOURIST JOURNAL

Kay Horkan, an OPC member for 25 years, reports she spent three recent weeks in Holland, where she formerly was editor of *Holland International* and *Amsterdam Today* magazines as well as broadcasting for the Dutch World Broadcasting Network and directing the English-

U.S.A. department of the Amsterdam tourist office.

Horkan, who specializes in travel, ski, and golf articles, also presented Bavarian Minister President Streibl the first copy of *GAP Journal*, a tourist magazine for Garmisch-Partenkirchen, where she bases her European operations.

SPIN DOCTOR

JUDGE JOINS MUSIC MAGAZINE

Michael Packenham, longtime OPC awards committee member, has moved from the *New York Daily News* to *Spin* magazine.

Ellis Cose took Packenham's post as Editorial Page Editor for the *Daily News*.

Share your activities. Overseas members: **Al Kaff, Cornell Univ. News Service, 840 Hanshaw Rd, Ithaca, NY 14850.** Domestic members: **Ralph Gardner, OPC, Suite 2116, 310 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.**

The Second Front

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perhaps more relevant: What kinds of systems do we find where the press is under the control of the government? Our protection—your protection—lies in the very anarchy of the media, in the chaos of a process that often seems out of control.

The so-called Establishment press in this country is, as its name implies, rather timid, lukewarm, predictable. But it often provides stability. The fringe press, on the left and the right, the journals of the arcane, even the slick, soft-porn magazines, are often the only voices of the disenfranchised, the unpopular, and the obscure. It is the competition among all the disparate voices of the American media that moves us eventually, ultimately, to the acquisition of something approaching the truth....

If the American press seems too negative, too obsessed with misdeeds rather than accomplishments, if we are too carping and critical, too prone to question the word of our leading citizens, understand that the Establishment has voices of its own. In Washington alone, the different branches and departments of Government employ more than 10,000 public-affairs officers, press secretaries, and spokespersons. *Ten Thousand....*

Our concern should be focused on the media, which is often too compliant, too trusting, too easily seduced. Skepticism is the lifeblood of democracy. If some of us cringe a little at the self-congratulatory outpouring of parades, at the fast-food outlets and car dealerships wrapped in yellow ribbons, at the television specials that resonate with the hollow drumbeat of a facile patriotism, then it is not because we begrudge our servicemen and -women either the thanks or the congratulations that are their due but, rather, that such events are too often used for profit or ratings or the political motives of those who stage them. Flags,

banners, and parades can be convenient symbols of patriotism, but they are no substitute for the real thing. Burn a flag, and you desecrate a symbol. But deny the right to burn a flag, and you undermine the freedom for which that flag stands.

All countries, all systems of government, lay claim to the same high-sounding principles. *Every* country is someone else's motherland or fatherland. *All* armies are made up of the brave young men and, increasingly, brave young women who stand ready to lay down their lives. The question is: For what?.... What distinguishes our system of government from most of those we find around the world is not what we say but what we do. It's not watching Charlton Heston reading the Bill of Rights with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir humming softly in the background that makes it meaningful; it's being allowed to exercise those rights, every day of our lives. And that even extends, within limits, to times of war.

You should have been allowed to see the tens of thousands of Iraqi dead on the battlefield. You should have seen the caskets of the American war dead coming home to Dover Air Force Base. War, to paraphrase Robert E. Lee, should be seen in all its ugliness, else we would grow to fond of it.

You should have known—*during* the war—that the vast majority of bombs dropped on Iraq had no special homing devices and did not fall into the category of "smart" bombs. Despite what we were all shown during those briefings at the Pentagon and Saudi Arabia, 70 percent of our bombs missed their targets....

If, as a people, we are to make intelligent decisions through our elected representatives on issues of such transcendent importance as war, then we must know what is going on, good and bad, as long as it does not imperil our forces in

the field. We don't have to broadcast from the battlefield live; in that respect, I agree with the Pentagon. The same satellite technology that enables a U.S. television network to broadcast a battle as it unfolds simultaneously conveys those pictures to our enemies. There must even be a reasonable capacity on the part of U.S. military commanders to censor information that could endanger plans, lives, and operations. But the control exercised by the Pentagon during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm went far beyond that.

The Pentagon insisted on press pools, on the pretext that it couldn't handle the vast number of reporters and photographers who came to Saudi Arabia, but almost a thousand of the journalists there were selected from local newspapers and television stations around the country and flown to Saudi Arabia by the Pentagon, precisely because they could be counted on to report relatively benign "hometown angle" stories....

We should recognize that the process of democracy is untidy and tedious, but we must prefer it to the punctuality and orderliness of dictatorship. We may sometimes yearn for an all-powerful, all-knowing, and incorruptible leader, but instinctively, we know the odds against our finding such a man or woman. Nothing so marks a democracy as its respect for the rights of the individual. But nothing so becomes a democracy as its unwillingness to regard anyone as irreplaceable. We do not raise statues to the living in this country, because we have determined, in our collective wisdom, that the designation of permanent heroes is best left to history, after we and the objects of our adoration are dead. Let the American media continue to be a thorn in the side, a pain in the butt to our most revered leaders and institutions. It is, when you consider the alternatives, by far the safest course.